



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

due importance without sacrificing the whole class hour to it,—and this is accomplished by the oral elements in the tests. Other teachers will undoubtedly prefer to make their “oral” tests more truly oral on the part of both teacher and student; but the plan herein described may be defended on the ground of saving time (by testing all at once), of fairness (all having the same test), and that, though written, it tests work which is a part of the genuine oral class exercise and therefore stimulates attention to that exercise.

It should be remembered that these remarks are not addressed to extreme radicals; teachers of that group do all of these things and more. They are meant for the great middle class of moderately progressive teachers whose minds are open to new values without being scornful of more conventional ways. If it be true that college teachers are less ready than those in the high schools to profit by progress in the field of oral instruction, these suggestions may have an especial appeal to such colleagues, for they spring from college experience.

*Clark University*

---

## READING KNOWLEDGE BY SELF-INSTRUCTION

---

*By E. PROKOSCH*

---

A LADY of New York's upper four hundred asked Mark Twain to recommend her a very exclusive language—one that the common herd surely would not understand. “Study French without a teacher,” was his reply.

The anecdote illustrates the American view of the study of foreign languages by self-instruction. The quality of the means available for such study is characteristic of that skeptic attitude. Whatever pedagogical objections may be raised against such German ‘self-teachers’ as the Langenscheidt or Haberland *Unterrichtsbriefe*, their accuracy and reliability does not admit of any doubt. Compared with them, all of our devices for autodidactic language study are superficial and untrustworthy.

That it should be so is not surprising. In Germany, economic, social, and cultural reasons had created an enormous demand for such books. With us, the demand is relatively small and the supply correspondingly meagre. The recent elimination of

German from the curriculum of most schools bids fair to bring about a temporary increase of that demand—a demand not long-lived enough to warrant the publication of decent instruction books, but sufficiently wide-spread to cause embarrassment.

At present the need for an independent study of German is especially pressing with graduate students. The demands of research and the requirements for higher degrees make a reading knowledge of German indispensable, but during recent years it was difficult or impossible to obtain it thru class work. Some undergraduate students are in a similar predicament. While this condition will probably be of short duration, it behooves teachers of German to meet it as well as they can by outlining and, as far as feasible, supervising informal courses of study. Their failure to do so would result in a deplorable waste of time and energy for those bewildered students. Left to their own devices, many of them wade thru grammars and dictionaries during months of growing disgust—and at last abandon the struggle with that 'awful German language.'

Is it possible for such students to acquire a reading knowledge? Their time is very limited, their linguistic training generally insignificant—*can* they successfully cope with their formidable task?

Yes, by all means, if they are shown the way. *The way?* Are teachers themselves in agreement about it? No, but this is the time for an attempt to reach some sort of an agreement on the general principles, and I believe that this Journal affords the best opportunity for an exchange of opinions on the question. To make a start, I shall briefly outline such a course of study as I deem practicable and efficient. It is the eclectic result of theoretical considerations and actual experiments. Its value, if it has any, will be greatly enhanced by corrections and suggestions from other teachers.

\* \* \*

When advising students who must learn to read German without a teacher, I first help them to overcome certain conventional superstitions concerning language study and outline for them a few fundamental principles, such as these:

'Reading knowledge' requires a *fluent pronunciation* as a primary condition. Correctness is not an intrinsic, but only an

incidental requisite, while fluency is indispensable. For even 'silent' reading implies a sound image, and as long as the mental transposition from the printed symbol to the phonetic reality is uncertain and faltering, the rapid, automatic understanding of the sense is seriously inhibited.—That I do not emphasize correctness of pronunciation, may seem heresy, but the purpose of my plan is to eliminate everything that is not unavoidably necessary for the acquisition of a 'reading knowledge' pure and simple. It is self-evident that a sensible way of reaching fluency will include a certain degree of correctness; but I fully agree with Henry Sweet who relates that, in learning Arabic, he intentionally and consistently substituted *p* for the glottal sop ('*ain*'), in order not to be impeded by the struggle with that difficult sound.

*Grammar* should not interfere with the first steps in reading. In the later stages a minimum of formal grammar must be studied semi-inductively, but at all times it ought to stay modestly in the back-ground.

*Translation* into English is no help, but a most vicious obstacle in learning to read. This does not necessarily exclude an occasional use of good printed translations. If required for examinations or for other concrete purposes, some practice in the technique of translation is necessary, but it must by all means be postponed until a fair measure of reading knowledge has been obtained.

In the acquisition of the passive *vocabulary* that, after all, forms the chief foundation of reading, the context must be the primary means, some rudiments of empiric etymology may offer a slight help to certain students, and vocabularies or dictionaries will have to be used as a last resort. Word lists for memorizing are of value only for certain purposes, such as an extensive acquaintance with the technical terms of the student's scientific specialty.

\* \* \*

On the basis of these general principles I suggest the following program:

FIRST STAGE.—Select a simple story with the general contents of which you are familiar. Grimm's Fairy Tales are a good start; of these *Sneewittchen* is perhaps the best story to begin with: It is generally known, it is simple, and it contains many repetitions. Do not try to 'learn' the German type; take it for granted that you know it. But secure some help for pronunciation. Let some-

one who knows German well very slowly enunciate parts of the text and repeat them as well as you can. Then read the whole story—first aloud, without giving much thought to the meaning, merely trying to read as fluently and consistently as possible, then silently, perhaps five or ten times, in an effort to guess the general drift of the story. *Do not use any vocabulary or dictionary for the time being.* After the third or fourth reading, underline puzzling words or phrases; if later you guess their meanings from the context, erase your marks. If most or all of them remain obscure—never mind, go on to the next story; Grimm's Fairy Tales are delightful, but they are no Bible.

Do not blunt the edge of your zeal by overdoing at the beginning. To read *Sneewittchen* carefully eight or ten times is a good week's work. Improve your pronunciation as you go along by studying some brief guide on German sounds (for instance, the chapter on pronunciation in any good German grammar). But remember: You are not doing that for the sake of correctness as an end, but only because certain sorts of mistakes are a hindrance to fluency, and fluency is a necessary foundation of reading knowledge.

Take up another story in the same way—perhaps *Aschenputtel* or *Rotkäppchen*. The selection in Vos' edition (American Book Company) is especially practical for the purpose. It is not a bad plan to read an English version a few days before you start the German text, but keep it well out of sight while you are reading the latter. Every day, before you begin your work with the new story, re-read five or ten pages of the old one, erasing marks below words as their meanings become clear to you.

When you have covered about one hundred pages in this way, devote a week to completion and review. Read each story once more and look up the words still underscored in a vocabulary or dictionary.

This stage does not include any study of grammar whatsoever. It ought to have given you fluency of pronunciation and the consciousness that it is possible to grasp the meaning of at least some parts of a German story without any interference from English equivalents. You should not translate, it is much too early for that.

SECOND STAGE.—I suggest a connected text, such as Storm's *Immensee*, Hauff's *Das kalte Herz*, or Rosegger's *Lex von Gutenhag*.

An edition with a vocabulary is convenient, but not necessary. At this stage a brief German grammar—a mere skeleton of the most important paradigms and rules—must also be secured.

Read a fairly long passage (about three or four pages) at a time, at first aloud, concentrating on fluent pronunciation, then silently, trying to fathom the meaning. During the first stage, it was permissible and even advisable to read an English version in preparation for the German text; at this stage, this is not to be recommended, altho it will not matter much in case you should happen to find an English translation and use it occasionally.—Proceed as before: Mark obscure words and passages, erase the marks when they become clear, and review the whole text, consulting the vocabulary for all words that remain unknown or uncertain.

Every day during this period, begin your work by reading a page or two in your synopsis of grammar. Intensive study is not necessary—just read each chapter several days in succession and begin to observe the forms in the text, to see how far they correspond to your nucleus of grammatical knowledge. When you have read and reviewed one of the recommended books, comprising about sixty pages each, ascertain the plurals of the nouns and the ‘principal parts’ of the verbs of the whole text from the vocabulary and write them in abbreviated form, on the margin of the book, or in a note-book.

THIRD STAGE.—Select a text of intermediate difficulty, of about 150 pages. Riehl, Eichendorff, Ebner-Eschenbach, Chamisso, Bohlau, Wildenbruch are good authors for the purpose; also some of the simpler stories by Keller or Meyer are easy enough. Read in the same way as before, except that going over the book three times will be sufficient, but pay more attention to grammatical forms, trying for instance, to give from memory plurals of nouns or to change the tenses of verbs. Refer to your brief grammar very frequently.

In addition to this, select every day a fairly connected passage of five or ten lines in various styles: narrative, descriptive, conversational, short sentences, involved periods, etc. Assign this to yourself for intensive analysis: Ascertain, by means of grammar and vocabulary or dictionary, the grammatical characteristics of every word, the exact construction of every sentence, the finest

shades of meaning that you are able to determine. Having done that, translate the passage into good, natural English. Every day, before proceeding with your routine work, review three or four of the passages that you analyzed on former days.

Students who have a good foundation in Latin grammar of the old style will derive the greatest benefit from this type of practice. After all, while inefficient for the acquisition of the Latin language itself, such grammatical training forms an excellent basis for the inductive study of modern languages.

FOURTH STAGE.—Take up a rather difficult prose text (for instance, C. F. Meyer, Raabe, Fontane, Freytag, Ludwig, Sudermann) and read it thru twice: the first time, to get the general trend of the story, underlining unknown words as before, the second time, with the dictionary, to clear up all difficulties. Follow this up with a prose drama (Hebbel, Goethe, Ludwig, Hauptmann are recommended) and then with a drama in verse (Goethe, Schiller, Grillparzer, Hebbel, Hauptmann). Every week thruout this stage, read a few poems in some good anthology and memorize as many of them as your previous memory training enables you to assimilate. Continue the detailed analysis and regular review of selected passages. Read the poetry aloud frequently and be careful to get the exact shades of meaning.

FIFTH STAGES.—If you expect to read scientific works, read, first of all, a brief German book or chapter in your specialty, preferably one of which an English translation is accessible. Read by paragraphs, consulting the dictionary for unknown word at the end of each paragraph, and review every day what you read on the preceding day. Then, to form some acquaintance with various scientific styles, read in the same way all of Paszkowski's *Deutsches Lesebuch* or Nicholl's *German Prose*. No further grammatical analysis should be needed at this stage.

TRANSLATION.—If you need the technique of translation for any definite purpose, such as an examination, this is the time to acquire it by special practice. Return to the reading of the first stage, translate two or three fairy tales into the best English of which you are capable. Occasional written translation is essential, its comparison with a good printed translation useful, but fairly fluent oral translation should chiefly be practiced. From the books of the other stages, select some twenty or thirty pages

each and treat them in the same way. Then, take up new material of difficult style, for instance, books on your scientific specialty, and translate it without any preliminary reading, using the dictionary as little as possible.

LATER READING.—The texts on this program amount to considerably less than one thousand pages. If read carefully and repeatedly, as indicated, this may represent at least five hundred hours' work, or about an hour and a half a day for a year. This is enough to *acquire* a good reading knowledge of German, including considerable readiness in translation, but not enough to *retain* it. Unless you want to lose the fruit of your work more rapidly than you gained it, you must continue your reading. No special directions for this are necessary, except perhaps these: Select what interests you most, read twice whatever you do read, underlining the first time what you fail to understand, and looking it up at the second reading. If you happen to need familiarity with many scientific terms, zoological and botanical names, etc., make up and study special lists of such words.

While the plan suggested is a 'short cut' as far as the outlay of time is concerned, it is by no means as easy a road as may appear at the beginning. It requires as much perseverance as the traditional dictionary and word list method, and certainly more ingenuity. But it insures a fluent and accurate reading knowledge in a time that is relatively small for the great mental enrichment that such an acquisition represents.

*Bryn Mawr College*

---

## SPANISH—PRACTICAL OR CULTURAL?

By WALTER A. SCOTT

---

(Read before the Modern Language Section, Southern Wisconsin Teachers' Association, Madison, Wisconsin, Feb. 17, 1922)

IT MAY seem that the question raised by the title of my paper has been already answered. "Spanish—Practical or Cultural?" Certainly, if this question were put to a thousand people, chosen at random, the great majority would say at once: "Practical Spanish, of course." Latin and French and German are the cul-